

The Remedy to Psychological Issues among Elderly from the Perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss on the psychological issue among the elderly. Old age is a stage in life that most people fear and are concerned about. The physical, cognitive and psychological deterioration that comes with it often makes the elderly feel depressed, sad, and helpless. This writing try to shield lighten from the work of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi on the remedy of the psychological issues among the elderly. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi provides a fresh perspective to the thinking for the elderly in dealing with their old age in a contented and relaxed state. The remedy by hope offered by him is aimed at providing the source of strength and healing for senior citizens during the later stages of their lives. Using analytical and descriptive method, the results of this study show that the seven elements of hope that Bediuzzaman Said Nursi focused on the capacity to boost faith and to allow senior citizens to appreciate that the joy and sweetness of life based on faith is also an opportunity to worship even towards the end of one's life.

Keywords: senior citizens, psychology, Bedi Uzzaman

1.0 Introduction

Most countries have attained old-age status owing to the large number of senior citizens in their populations. There were 703 million people aged 65-years and above globally in 2019 and the number is expected to double to 1.5 billion by 2050. Globally, the proportion of persons aged 65 and over increased from 6 percent in 1990 to 9 percent in 2019. That number is expected to grow further to 16 percent by 2050, so that one in six persons in the world will be in that age category.

The larger numbers of senior citizens and issues of their neglect are major challenges for ALL countries. A number of these issues revolve around financial, social, physical, and psychological aspects (Nik Mustapha Nik Hassan, 2015). In fact, according to Sharif (2013), senior citizens could become a liability to nations due to the rising costs of the above issues. According to Syahrin (2001) the government allocates RM2,033,360 annually for the food and medication of residents in all Seri Kenangan Homes throughout Malaysia, and these expenses are increasing over the years.

Malaysia is now moving towards aging-nation status due to declining fertility rates and increasing lifespans. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, as of July 2016, 6% of the Malaysian

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population were senior citizens above 65-years of age and this figure is expected to rise in the coming decades (Aizan Hamid, Jariah Masud, & Rahimah Ibrahim, 2017). In addition, according to the 2010-2040 population projections by the Department of Statistics, the number of persons aged between 60 - 74 years will increase by almost 2.5 times from 1.8 million in 2010 to 4.5 million by 2040. The number of senior citizens aged 75-years and over will increase from 0.5 million to 1.8 million over the same period, a nearly fourfold increase. With this increase, Malaysia will become an aged-nation by 2035 when 15% of its population is over 60 (Aizan Hamid, Jariah Masud, Rahimah Ibrahim, 2017). As such, Malaysia can no longer afford to avoid addressing issues related to its aging population.

The World Assembly on Aging (1982) in Vienna defines the elderly as those aged 60 years and above while the United Nations (UN) defines an “aging nation” based on the age of the majority of its population. The UN also refers to a nation as aging when the majority of its population is aged 65 and above for the developed world and 60 and above for those in developing countries. Malaysia is still a developing country and has set the age of 60 years to define senior citizens (Surina Nayan, 2006; Sabitha, 1996; Khadijah Alavi, 2011). However, Nor Raudah (2015) defines senior citizens as those over 65 years taking into account the nation’s economic status, education level, better health status, advanced medical facilities, and longer life expectancy compared to other developing countries.

The World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes senior citizen ages into three stages, namely early, middle, and late old-age. Senior citizens in the first category comprise those aged 50 to 65 years and still able to work and contribute to society. Those in the second category are aged between 65 to 75 years. They are usually retired from the job sector, have relatively good health status, and still have the capability to improve their situation. The third category of senior citizens comprises those aged 75 years and above, and they are usually in a stage of dotage and poor health and they can contribute less to society.

In general, old-age classifications vary depending on location, cultures, time, and social perceptions. In Malaysia, persons are considered senior citizens when they retire from employment (Elmi Baharuddin, 2013). For government employees, the retirement age is 57 years while it is 60 years and above for those in the private sector. Therefore, senior citizens in Malaysia are considered old if they have passed their retirement age and have become pensionable.

Human beings begin to experience a deterioration in their physical and mental faculties from age 50. Islamic scholars describe these disabilities to include physical, mental, and memory loss as well as lowered psychological status. Nevertheless, such a stage has its own unseen wisdoms and blessings. The Qur’an carries a message for the human race to constantly empathize with the weak such as the elderly. The Qur’an provides in great detail the need to be always gentle and caring in attending to the physical as well as the psychological and spiritual well-being of such persons.

2.0 Issues Faced by the Elderly

By nature, the process of aging involves undergoing a phase of deterioration of the faculties and loss of ability. The deterioration that occur are physical, cognitive, and psychological. Such declines require social support from the family members as well as consideration from members of the society. Physical impairments include decreased sensory functions such as poor eyesight, hearing, and even oral ability. In addition, the cognitive levels of older people will also decrease if brain stimulation does not occur. Older people are more likely to forget recent events and things and recollect bygone ones. This is explained in the Qur'an's Surah al-Rum (30:54) that: "It is Allah who created you in a state of weakness; then after weakness He gave you strength, then after strength He made you weak and old. He creates what He pleases. He is All-Knower, All-Powerful".

This is because their attention spans and focus are short. These physical and cognitive impairments reduce the self-esteem of the elderly and affect their psychological well-being. They are prone to being sensitive, have easily changeable moods, a high sense of ego, and so on.

In principle, the government has met the biological requirements and the basic needs of the elderly through the provision of food, shelter, health care, and in financial aspects. However, the most important factor that is lacking is the provision of spiritual education to the elderly (Elmi Baharuddin & Zainab Ismail, 2013). Therefore, the strengthening of spiritual elements, spiritual power, and aspects of love and empathy are extremely important for addressing the psychological issues faced by the elderly.

Another concern relating to senior citizens is the rise in mental health issues. According to Yusfaiza (2017), 25% of those aged over 65 have been diagnosed with mental illnesses such as depression, empty nest syndrome, dementia, Alzheimer's, and so on. This situation does not seem to have any ready solution especially since the elderly who have been abandoned by their children are incapacitated not only physically but also mentally. This has placed increased pressure on the government as the demand for caregivers at homes for the elderly has also risen (Surina Nayan, 2006; Khadijah Alavi, 2017). Sadness, depression, and stress if not managed properly are among the causes and effects impacting the mental well-being of the elderly. A soul bereft of sound spiritual values loses spiritual and emotional tranquillity.

3.0 Psychological Issues Among the Elderly

Psychological elements are among the important factors that need to be appreciated by children and the young in addressing the position of the elderly. According to Shalini and Seow Ta Wee (2014), the emotional changes that occur among those entering their senior years are lack of confidence, dejection, loneliness, low self-esteem, and anxiety. They are more sensitive, self-centred, temperamental, and inflexible. In fact, they continue, the elderly seem to behave like children of ages between 2 - 4 years. This is clearly stated in the Qur'an in Surah Yasin (36:68) where Allah ((SWT)) says: "And he to whom We grant long life We reverse in creation (again weak and unreasonable, like a small child); so, will they not understand?"

In this regard, the biologist Wolff (1959) agrees with the psychologist Gitelson who states that the elderly are more prone to unstable emotions that are characterized by symptoms such as: (1) diminished recollection of more recent events; (2) sharper recollection of past events, especially during times of success; (3) greater firmness to compensate for the sense of insecurity; (4) extreme depression due to a sense of isolation and loneliness; (5) excessive sensitivity as well as being petulant and paranoid; and (6) anxiety over the imminence of death especially arising from the loss of relatives.

In understanding human emotional development, Erikson (1964) outlines eight principles in its development at each level from infancy to the end of life. Specific emotional conflicts exist at each of these levels, and the individuals who are failing to overcome them, are then faced with psychological adjustment issues. According to him, the ages of 60 onwards represent an integrative phase where individuals decide on whether to resist or succumb to the changes. At this stage, they become wiser and more knowledgeable about their philosophy of life. When they are able to fulfil all the responsibilities they have been entrusted with during their lives, they will find greater inner peace. As such, their high level of confidence and happiness during their development in the life affect the later generations. With reflection on their successes or failures, senior citizens will be able to evaluate their individual lives far better than others. On the other hand, the elderly who cannot accept the meaning of failure in life will be discouraged because they believe that life is short and there is no time to start a new fresh life. Individuals facing conflict at this level are those who still do not have a sound philosophy of life. The inability of elderly to deal with issues late in life can place them at risk of becoming depressed and suffer from loneliness which can then lead to mental health problems. The elderly who are depressed typically exhibit problems in several domains such as inability to focus and pay attention, visual and working memory loss, executive function deficit, or inability to learn new things (Tengku Aizan et al., 2017).

In Surah al-Nahl (16: 70) in the Qur'an, Allah ((SWT)) explains that: "...and among you is he who is reversed to the most decrepit [old] age so that he will not know, after [having had] knowledge of a thing...". In viewing the psychological issues faced by senior citizens, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi has brought a whole new dimension to the thinking on old age. His writings begin with his regret and sadness that he has experienced old age and then go on to formulate a remedy from the Qur'an that brings the light of faith to strengthen the spirituality of the elderly. This shows that while it is normal to lament old age, that sadness needs to be countered and remedied with faith. Strong faith and steadfast spirituality will lead to an old age that is serene and filled with contentment.

4.0 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his *Risale-i Nur*

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was a well-known Muslim scholar and preacher in Turkey. He was born in 1877 in Bitlis, East Anatolia during the late period of the Ottoman Empire in a peasant family of moderate Kurds. He was the fourth child of seven siblings Durriyyah, Hanim, Abdullah, Said, Muhammad, Abdul Majid, and Marjan. Said Nursi is given the honorific "Badi' al-Zaman" meaning "Wonder of the Age" because of his ability to master traditional religious knowledge and modern science at a very young age. He remains a leading figure in Turkey to this day (Biro Kajian Ilmiah Altinbasak, 2011).

The *Risale-i Nur* is a Qur'anic commentary by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It contains over 130 titles in books such as *al-Kalimat*, *al-Maktubat*, *al-Lama'at*, *al-Shu'a'at*, *Isharat al-I'jaz fi Mazan al-Ijaz*, *al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri*, *Sayqal al-Islam* and *al-Malahiq*. The aim of the *Risale-i Nur* is to safeguard faith by explaining the essence and facts of the Qur'an especially the arguments on complex issues that address the oneness of Allah ((SWT)), the hereafter, and others. In the early years in 19th centuries, the *Risale-i Nur* such as the *Isyarat al-I'jaz* and *al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri* was written in Arabic. When the Muslim community no longer mastered the Arabic language, Said Nursi produced his later works in Turkish but using the Arabic alphabet (Ottoman Turkish Letters) (Biro Kajian Ilmiah Altinbasak, 2011).

5.0 The Remedy to Psychological Problems from the Perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi shared with readers his reflections on his life's journey as a senior citizen even though he was only in his early 40s at that time. These reflections are contained in the Twenty-six Illuminations which is part of his collection of books known as the *Risale-i Nur*. In his writings, he highlights 26 hope-based perspectives of faith as the remedy from Allah (SWT) for all kinds of psychological issues experienced by senior citizens. Here he analyses only seven of the 26 hopes, each providing a remedy for the psychological problems experienced by the elderly in the form of a lens of faith on any life journey that is contemplated.

First Hope

Faith in Allah (SWT) forms the basis for all hope among the elderly. Such a view of faith will change their perspective in responding to emotions such as feelings of helplessness, loneliness, fear of separation, disappointment, guilt, regret, and others.

Second Hope

Towards the end of their life spans, most senior citizens are disturbed at suddenly finding themselves at that stage. They seem to realize that life is nearing its end. Their physical and mental strength is also decreasing. However, the belief in the endless mercy of *al-Khaliq al-Rahim* to weak beings helps eliminate the despondency. Said Nursi states in the Twenty-six Illuminations:

“Yea, old people like me! The mercy of our *al-Khaliq ar-Rahim* who introduces Himself through the nature of His *al-Rahman al-Rahim* in one hundred places in the Qur'an al-Hakim; always sending His grace to help living beings who seek mercy on the earth; fills the spring with countless blessings and gifts every year from the supernatural and gives it to all of us who desire the sustenance and who show more

manifestations of His mercy based on the level of misfortune and weakness is the greatest hope and the brightest light in our old age”.

Therefore, the only way to obtain the grace of Allah (SWT) is to rely on Him and obey all His commandments.

Third Hope

The belief that this life will end once our eyes are closed is a deception. In fact, the transmigration of the spirit into the natural world is a gateway to eternal life. It is also the door to meet the companions, the righteous, and in particular our adored noble Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Badiuzzaman Said Nursi says:

“But the place in limbo that seems to us to be a partition and a darkness and the impressions that come from those who are negligent and who are astray, is actually a gathering place for the beloved. It is the place for us to meet again with our first intercessor, Habibullah Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam and all our friends”.

Therefore, for one to receive the intercession of the Prophet (SAW) in the hereafter is by following his traditions.

Fourth Hope

Feelings of regret, despair, and frustration at the life gone by are among the emotions experienced by older people. However, with the Qur’an as a guide, a remedy, a guidance, and a source of light, such disturbances can be overcome. He notes:

“In view of the Qur’an in our hands is the pen and the word that has come from the absolute Rububiyyah of al-Khaliq Dzul Jalal’s heaven and earth, from the aspect of the supremacy of sincerity and from the side of infinite mercy. This is also a source of His blessings. Then hold firmly to it. In it there is an antidote for each disease, a light for all darkness, and a hope for every despair. ”

Therefore, in order to make the Qur’an a source of light of peace and a remedy for remorse and despair, let us, especially the elderly, increase the reading of the Qur’an and review each of its verses. In it there is merit in the form of rewards and peace in knowing the truths of the Creator (Allah (SWT)).

Fifth Hope

Most elderly people are haunted by the fear of separation from their loved ones such as a husband or wife, mother, children and siblings, relatives, and close friends. However, having a strong conviction that the

Hereafter is eternal, life there will be more enriching for those who believe. They will be freed from the burdens of a world full of trials and challenges. As Said Nursi states:

“Yea, dear old brothers like me! Since the hereafter exists and since it is permanent, since it is more beautiful than the world, and since He who has made us is all-judging and al-merciful, we should not complain and grieve at old age. Instead, we should rejoice from the point of view that it is an address for our entry into the age of perfection in worship through faith, and our departure into the realm of grace to rest after departing from the duties of life”.

Therefore, for the elderly who long for eternal life, faith alone will lead to hope and peace.

Sixth Hope

In addition to the sadness of being separated from the life of the world, today’s scenario as children busy with their careers. Some elderly still feel lonely despite living with their children. There are also those less fortunate who are left by their children in the care of old folks’ homes. As such, the elderly whose children have grown up and have their own families and careers, will, of course, feel lonely. However, with the conviction that Allah (SWT) is always with them they believe that He sends angels to watch over them. Allah (SWT) created everything in heaven and on earth for human use. When the elderly believe this, they will appreciate that in reality they are not alone because the entire world of animals, plants, the wind, clouds, and others are their companions. Said Nursi states:

“Yea, old men and women! Since our Creator is all-Merciful, there will be no isolation for us. Since He exists then everything is there for us. Since He exists, so do His angels. Therefore, the world is not empty. The lonely mountains, the barren deserts are full of the servants of the Truth the Exalted and the Glorified. In addition to His wise servants, His light, His reckonings, His stones, and His trees are like amicable friends. These creatures can talk to us through their verbal communication and entertain us”.

Faith in Allah (SWT) is the remedy to the sense of isolation and loneliness in old age. Therefore, it is important for each person to prepare themselves with total faith in Allah (SWT) so that when old age approaches them, there will not be any kind of lonesome and isolated. When Allah (SWT) is constantly in the heart then everything is for us.

Seventh Hope

Often older people are haunted by feelings of guilt over their past lives. After realizing their time is running out, such regrets invite greater emotional problems such as depression. However, having a reservoir of understanding of the truth of the Qur’an allows a senior citizen to believe that what he has been through in life has not been in vain. The faith in Allah (SWT) as an acceptor of repentance is capable of converting

past transgressions into forms of charity. Repentance is a small endeavour (*juzu 'ikhtiyar*) that senior citizens can easily afford to practice. However, its value lies in protecting the dimensions of the past and the future. Said Nursi states:

“In fact, faith provides a deed of support to the hand of the soul so that it relies on infinite power and mercy to protect against the enemy and the infinite darkness in place of the supreme constituency (*al-kasb*) which has very little in hand. In fact, the faith itself becomes the will in the hands of the owner. Whereas the essences of human weapons are in fact weak, limited, and lacking. However, just as a soldier can go beyond many times beyond his capability in using his power in the name of governments, so too will the small elements be used in the path of the All-Mighty in His name and the secrets of faith, and it too can be achieve paradise as broad as five hundred years”.

Being aware of this, a senior citizen will choose to repent for any past wrongdoings rather than remain in a state of constant and painful remorse.

6.0 Conclusion

Despite the weaknesses after weaknesses experienced by the elderly, all of them have some important message which should be acknowledged by the elderly. Although Bediuzzaman Said Nursi recognized his feelings of loneliness and sadness at entering old age, he nevertheless brought a cure for them by relying entirely on the teachings and truths of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in eliminating fear, guilt, loneliness, and so on. Complete reliance on Allah (SWT) will enable the elderly to feel more contented than merely relying on their own strengths and the assistance of others. Therefore, he called on the elderly to be close to the Qur'an, to study each of its verses, to reflect on Allah (SWT)'s wonderful and unique creations as a balm and solace for the psychological problems that they experience. As for youth, being aware of the issues related to old age and of the remedy presented by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, they should utilize their youth by preparing for their future old age. This preparation is none other than that of faith through the truths of the Qur'an. This is clearly explained in Surah al-Fatir (35:37) where Allah (SWT) says: “Did we not give you long enough life so that you would receive admonition? And (moreover) the warner (Prophet (SAW)) came to you”.

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